Top 25 roundup

Chenowith leads KU past Illinois

The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Eric Chenowith is establishing himself as an inside scoring threat for Kansas.

Just as importantly, the 7-foot sophomore center also is establishing himself as a threat to opponents' inside scoring.

Chenowith scored 18 points and matched his career high with seven blocked shots Saturday as No. 13 Kansas beat Illinois 65-55 at Kemper Arena.

But Chenowith, who also blocked seven shots Thursday against DePaul and had at least three blocks in each of Kansas' last four games, was happier with his defense than with his offense on Saturday.

"I shot 6-for-15. That's terrible," he said. "I've been trying to go to the hole more and not shoot those turnaround jumpers so much, but they just felt so good early in the game."

Guard Ryan Robertson also scored 18 points for Kansas (8-2), which won despite its own offensive cold spells — and a career-high 26 points by Illinois freshman Cory Bradford.

Robertson, 10-for-10 from the line, also turned in a key defensive play. He stole an inbounds pass with 53 seconds left and Kansas ahead 59-52, was fouled on the resulting possession. He hit both free throws.

"I was able to see the play coming and react to it, but the credit on that play should really go to Eric Chenowith," Robertson said. "He made a good tip on the ball, and I was able to steal it."

Nick Bradford added 13 points and 10 rebounds for the Jayhawks, who won despite scoring only seven points in the last 4 1/2 minutes.

Cory Bradford hit six 3-pointers — five in the second half — for Illinois (7-3).

"I was getting some wide-open shots and just hoping not to miss," said Bradford, who had 21 points after the half but only three in the final 5:26.

"We finally realized that he was the only one scoring for them," Robertson said. "We had a couple of really good individual efforts on him, but it was really a team effort to shut him down."

Kenny Gregory, who came in as Kansas' leading scorer at 16 points per game, didn't score in the first 33 minutes and finished with 3 points. His 3-pointer with 6:51 left gave the Jayhawks a 56-44 lead, but Kansas managed only one field goal after that.

"I can't have too many games like that," said Gregory, benched by coach Roy Williams for the last seven minutes of the first half. "I'm just going to take this as a learning experience and try to move on."

Kansas led 29-21 after a first half in which both teams were woeful from the field.

The Jayhawks, who shot 38 percent, led 16-9 after eight minutes but went scoreless for almost six minutes. They also were outrebounded 26-12 in the first half, including a 16-1 Illinois advantage at Kansas' offensive end.

For the game, Illinois outrebounded the Jayhawks 52-36 for the highest rebounding margin by a Kansas opponent since Indiana's 57-40 advantage on Dec. 17, 1994.

"They fight like crazy not to let you have any second shots," Williams said. "We fight like crazy on defense. I figured it would probably be a low-scoring game, and probably an ugly game."

But the Illini, who shot just 26 percent from the field and committed 17 first-half turnovers, couldn't take advantage of Kansas' first-half lull. Illinois closed the gap to 19-17 on Victor Chukwudebe's free throws with 5:31 left, but then didn't get another field goal until 21.3 seconds remained.

Cleotis Brown went 4-for-7 from the field and scored 11 of his 12 points in the first half for Illinois, while the rest of the Illini were 3-for-20.

"I don't think we handled the ball well when they double-teamed," said Illinois coach Lon Kruger. "We panicked."

No. 15 St. John's 88, Fordham 57

NEW YORK — Tyrone Grant scored 16 points and No. 15 St. John's beat Fordham 88-57 Saturday night, the Red Storm's sixth straight victory, all by at least 19 points.

St. John's (9-2), which has lost only to No. 6 Stanford and No. 8 Purdue, had another strong defensive performance, holding the Rams (4-3) to 36 percent shooting (21-of-58) and taking command with a 16-3 run over the final six minutes of the first half.

Fordham, which had won three straight, went 1-for-10 from the field, had three turnovers and was charged with a technical foul over the closing minutes of the half as St. John's took a 42-23 lead.

The Red Storm, who have not allowed an opponent to reach 70 points in the streak, opened the second half with a 21-9 run to take a 63-32 lead on a short jumper by Artest with 13:18 to play.

Ron Artest had 15 points, Lavor Postell added 13 and Erick Barkley had 12 for St. John's, which has won four straight games and 27 of the last 28 in the series between the New York City rivals.

Bevon Robin led the Rams with 20 points.

Fordham was within 26-20 with 6:22 left in the first half when the Red Storm turned up the defensive intensity. The only points the Rams had in the stretch were a 3-pointer by Robin and three of their turnovers led directly to St. John's points, two on a steal and breakaway dunk by Artest with 3:21 left.

No. 11 New Mexico 102, Sacramento St. 71

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Kenny Thomas returned to the lineup with his 25th career double-double and John Robinson made three straight 3-pointers early in the second half for the Lobos.

Thomas, who sat out the first semester to settle an eligibility dispute, had 17 points and 12 rebounds in his senior debut.

New Mexico made 69.6 percent (16-for-23) of its 3-pointers as it improved to 7-0 and sent Sacramento State (0-8) to its 26th consecutive loss.

Robinson had 17 points, eight assists and went 5-for-7 on 3-pointers. His 3s to start the second half extended an eight-point lead to 56-41 with 17:19 left.

No. 17 Minnesota, 55, Nebraska 51

LINCOLN, Neb. — Quincy Lewis scored 15 points and had 10 rebounds as Minnesota survived 13 second-half turnovers to beat Nebraska.

The only thing that saved the Golden Gophers (7-1) was Nebraska's woeful shooting. The Huskers (6-5) shot 25 percent (14-of-55) for the night and went without a field goal over the last three minutes.

Nebraska's 25-percent shooting was the lowest for the Huskers in 13 seasons under Danny Nee and the team's worst effort at home since the Devaney Sports Center opened in 1977. Huskers center Venson Hamilton had 15 rebounds but shot 0-for-9 from the field as the Gophers shut down Nebraska's inside game.

No. 25 Iowa 82, Missouri 68

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Jess Settles scored 16 points and Iowa overcame ragged shooting to win its sixth straight game while snapping Missouri's six-game winning streak.

Dean Oliver scored 14 points, Guy Rucker 12 and J.R. Koch 11 for the Hawkeyes (8-1), who broke into the rankings this week after defeating two other Big 12 Conference foes, Kansas and Iowa State, last week.

John Woods finished with 19 points, Albert White had 13 and Brian Grawer 10 for Missouri (7-2), which held the Hawkeyes to 42 percent shooting but imploded with 23 turnovers.

Kansas center Eric Chenowith, left, and teammate forward T.J. Pugh, right, try to pry the ball from the grasp of Illinois' Robert Archibald during the first half Saturday at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

NCAA basketball down to an early final four

Kevin McNamara
The Providence Journal

PROVIDENCE — It's easy to like Duke. Maryland looks real good. UConn is very strong. Kentucky is as good as anyone.

But that's about it. That is the creme de la creme of college hoops right now, the teams that look to be a cut above the rest of the country. It's a good bet the national champion comes from this group.

That being said, the rest of the country is a mess. Teams are a week away from conference play and the vast majority are still having major trouble putting a stamp on themselves. So many teams are so very close in talent that this season looks as wide open as any in recent memory. With hardship taking the true superstars into the pros, there are fewer dominating teams and fewer players who can consistently carry a team.

Providence College and the University of Rhode Island are good examples. The Friars were strong at the start, but the team's six-game winning streak deluded fans a bit. Two tough Big East losses later and the Friars look very much like last year's team. Quite simply, PC relies on a defense that must be superb every game and an offense with no inside attack that must shoot the ball very well. If either component is missing, the Friars struggle.

The addition this week of both a healthy Kendrick Moore and JUCO transfer Leon Brisport will shake up the team and give Tim Welsh two more key options. Moore has returned to workouts but the stress fracture in his left foot is still very sore. Brisport will begin practicing on Tuesday and might see time next Sunday against Purdue.

URI is easier to figure. The Rams are getting better, adjusting to Jim Harrick and themselves. Lamar Odom is feeling his way and growing into the role as the focus of the team. Preston Murphy's foot injury and the loss of Zach Marbury set the team back but the hits the Rams took this month can be overcome.

How might these two teams fare over the next two months? Both could fight their way to the post-season. The Friars have a much tougher road, mainly because the Big East is stronger and Purdue and Arkansas remain on the schedule. First of all, Jamel Thomas must be the best player in the Big East. That's asking a lot. But, after UConn, the Big East mirrors the rest of the country. Throw out Boston College and everyone can beat the other teams on a given night. There's little difference between PC and Villanova, Seton Hall and Rutgers, Pittsburgh and Syracuse.

Rhody is helped big-time by the strength of its schedule. The A-10 is off to a slow start but the Rams still have to go into the Mullins Center, Temple's Appolo, and the Cincinnati Gardens and come home with wins. That's a tough order, especially with a team that's so thin in the backcourt.

Even so, the Rams can beat anyone in their league. They might even become the best team in the A-10. That's how wide open the conference — and the country — is this season.

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